

STAFFING FOR THE NATIONAL WARNING SYSTEM

*Return to
Lehman*

I. Introduction

1. In the fall of 1978, the Warning Working Group* set up an ad hoc study committee to review the future of the Strategic Warning Staff. The WWG met on 10-11 January to consider the study group report. This report presents the WWG's findings both as to the SWS and as to other staff needs of the National Intelligence Officer for Warning. These two components should be treated together and functions allocated to each.

II. Functions of a National System for Warning

2. Responsibilities at the national level divide easily into two parts. The first is managerial, those measures undertaken to make the warning activities of the Intelligence Community more effective. The second is substantive, the act of warning itself or of bringing the analytic techniques of warning intelligence to bear on Community assessments of a current situation. We have identified four functions, in each of which there is a managerial component and in two of which there is also a major substantive component.

3. "Procedures". This function deals with incremental changes to information flows and wiring diagrams in the national system that make it work better. It includes planning arrangements that would enable the DCI to provide effective intelligence support to the national authorities in crisis. The latter is, however, a planning function only; the actual provision of that support in crisis is a line responsibility for Community managers.

4. Systems and Budget. There is an indications and warning return from most if not all major collection systems, and substantial NFIP funds go to I&W. While these are not defined and at least in the budget case are probably not fully definable, usefulness to I&W is often put forward as a justification for programs. Conversely, the critical nature of certain programs for I&W is sometimes not apparent at the level of aggregation at which budget decisions are made. A staff capable of dealing in detail either with system evaluation or with budget analysis would be expensive and duplicatory, but the NIO/W should have available enough expertise to be able on a selective basis to give advice in these matters.

*Membership given in Annex A

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5. Warning, Broadly Defined. The goal of the national system is to avoid surprise of the President and the National Security Council by events abroad that really matter to them.* This definition establishes a spectrum ranging from the "bolt from the blue" to a deliberately undefined point at which it trails off into matters of evanescent interest to the national authorities. The more critical end of the spectrum, involving as it does warning of impending hostilities, is what is usually called "strategic warning."** We consider this a subset of the warning problem as a whole. Next come third world crises that contain a threat of escalation, or political upheavals in countries of major importance to us, and so on down the scale of criticality until one reaches the coup in Benin that clearly does not matter to the NSC.

6. The mix of disciplines required to provide warning varies across this broad spectrum. At the less critical end the questions are largely political and the techniques of political analysis must be applied. As one moves up the scale toward nuclear war, the military component grows and with it the application of the "indications" methodology to warning problems. Even at the nuclear end, however, there is a critical political component; a decision to go to war is a political decision. Indeed, our failures have largely been the result of weakness in political intelligence. There is a need to focus the national system on these broader political problems of warning. Specifically we must find ways to sensitize analysts to their warning responsibilities, to provide a check against their analysis, to build mechanisms for extracting warning from day-to-day political analysis, and to train political analysts in more systematic approaches to critical problems.

7. Strategic Warning. As noted above, strategic warning can be considered a subset of the broader warning problem. It is, of course, the most critical and the most difficult, because it involves bringing about a melding of political analysis and military-oriented indications analysis, two quite different cultures and disciplines. It requires,

*Defined as follows in a revised DCID 1/5 now in preparation:

Warning encompasses those measures taken, and the intelligence information produced, by the Intelligence Community to avoid surprise to the President, the NSC, and the Armed Forces of the United States by foreign events of major importance to the security of the United States. It includes strategic warning.

**Defined as follows in the revised DCID:

Strategic Warning is intelligence information or intelligence regarding the threat of the initiation of hostilities against the US or in which US forces may become involved; it may be received at any time prior to the initiation of hostilities. It does not include tactical warning.

we believe, special and detailed attention simply because the issues are so important to the national interest. That attention includes all of the tasks listed under broad warning, and in addition requires specialized attention to indications techniques, including the organization of a research program in depth. It is only by studying how the Soviets plan to go to war and how they conduct themselves in crisis that valid lists of indicators can be developed. Moreover, judgments as to the length of warning time that intelligence can provide are crucial to major national budgetary decisions. There is therefore a need to develop and monitor both indications systems and research programs in support thereof. These needs are central to the question of the Strategic Warning Staff.

III. The Problem of Strategic Warning

8. The Strategic Warning Staff was established in 1974 as a replacement for the National Indications Center. It is located in the National Military Intelligence Center, which provides it its support, and is jointly manned by the agencies of the Intelligence Community. The Director is by charter to be a CIA officer. (Staffing details are given in Annex B.) While there has been general agreement in the Community that such an organization is needed, there is equal agreement that the Strategic Warning Staff needs improvement. Community agencies must give it full support, particularly in ensuring that its billets, including the vacant ones, are filled by first-rate personnel. Fundamental to this is a clearer definition of its mission and more visibility for its functions.

9. The Warning Working Group believes that there are certain functions that need to be carried out at the national level in the strategic warning field, it not by the SWS then by some other organization. These include:

- Synthesis. There needs to be a place in which political, military, and economic intelligence is brought together systematically, where the indications methodology intersects with the less structured output of political analysis. (We note that this is easier to say than to do.)
- Conscience. There needs to be an organization that can "think ominously" about strategic warning. This does not mean devil's advocacy -- an institutional bias toward crying wolf -- but rather having professional analysts schooled in the discipline of warning intelligence who can bring that perspective into Community deliberations. An example is the present situation in Indochina. There was every reason in logic for the Vietnamese not to go all out in Cambodia, and there was every reason in logic for the Chinese not to commit themselves to retaliation, but accumulated indications pointed the other way; the SWS insisted that this be recognized.

- Dialogue. There needs to be a mechanism for encouraging and monitoring discussion among Washington agencies and between Washington and the field commands on warning matters.
- Research. There needs to a mechanism for carrying out, leading, and coordinating fundamental research on strategic warning topics and in support of national estimates of warning capabilities. NIT II.1 calls for such a program.
- Methodology. There needs to be a mechanism for coordinating and assisting in the development of indicators and I&W techniques. Both the analytic and collection disciplines are involved. The SWS, jointly with Collection Tasking Staff and the CCF, can be the focus for this activity. Finally, there needs to be a repository of expertise on indications methodology that can be used to assist NIOs when regional problems escalate.

10. In the abstract, these functions sound impressive. Historically, however, organizations seeking to carry them out have faced serious challenges:

- Genuine strategic warning situations are rare. If the charter is defined narrowly, it leads to stagnation. If to avoid this it is defined broadly, it leads to diffusion of effort and overlap with current intelligence.
- To be effective, an organization must have a rhythm to its work; it needs the discipline of a periodic review of its efforts. Moreover, it must maintain visibility in the Community if it is to get the support it needs. This inevitably leads to the issuance of a periodical, yet such periodicals tend to become stereotyped and lose the attention of the policy officer.
- Even with a relatively narrow charter, it must receive great volumes of cable traffic. With a small staff, however, it can become drowned in paper; cable-reading will crowd out thinking.
- A responsibility to "think ominously" has often required carrying analysis beyond what the evidence will fully support. It is difficult in such cases to avoid being seen by line organizations as an adversary and trouble-maker. This can cause unnecessary resistance to new theses and break down essential exchanges of ideas and information between SWS and these organizations. Moreover, thinking ominously can drift into crying wolf, at considerable cost to credibility.

11. Knowledge that such predecessors of the SWS as the National Indications Center could not overcome these problems has made it difficult for the SWS to attract the personnel it needs; this in turn magnifies the problem. Nonetheless, we believe that a generally understood concept of operation, strong management, good personnel and the backing of the Community can do a great deal. With the NIOs now explicitly charged with a broad warning function, the SWS should concentrate on the strategic end of the spectrum. (But NIO/W should have authority to define where its limits should be and to make exceptions.) We believe that the problems of stagnation and sterility can be met by provision of enough personnel to carry out a daily or weekly discipline and a research program, while leaving adequate time for critical thought. Management can then arrange for a rotation of personnel among functions. Despite the traps, we favor a periodical issuance, in normal times a vehicle for encouragement of dialogue within the Community, with a dissemination limited to intelligence officers engaged in or responsible for I&W. In crisis periods, on decision of NIO/W, this periodical would be disseminated to the policy officer, who would then need detailed reporting of this kind. The difficulties of being a conscience without becoming an adversary can be met by mutual understanding frequent rotation, and a delicate managerial hand. (Any such program, however, is dependent on the quantity of personnel as well as quality; see our recommendations below.)

12. If there continues to be an organization devoted to strategic warning, as we recommend, there are several secondary questions that must be answered: its location, its subordination, its manning policy, its scope, and its name.

- Location. The present SWS is located in and supported by NMIC. We believe this arrangement makes sense, both for reasons of function and of economy. Location in the NMIC provides access to relevant intelligence and ready interface with the DoD I&W system. Moreover, SWS is close to the National Intelligence Tasking Officer for Warning and Crisis Management, and to the Consolidated Collection Facility. Location in a fully-developed intelligence center obviates the need for an expensive 24-hour operation in the SWS except in crisis. NIO/W, on the other hand, needs to be at Langley, where he is close to the DCI, DDCI, and the other NIOs.
- Subordination. The DCI has placed the SWS under the NIO/W. This makes sense, but the necessary physical separation of the two elements will create problems. These can be overcome if NIO/W can spend a portion of his time in the NMIC and if he ensures that SWS has a strong Director. The present arrangement is that the

Director/SWS shall come from CIA. We believe this arrangement should continue in the short run, but we would not wish to rule out a different arrangement in the future.

- Manning Policy. The present SWS is manned jointly by the Community agencies. We believe it is important to continue agency representation if the purpose is to rebuild links between the individual agencies and commands and the SWS as a central node of the national warning system. As we have noted, however, the contributors of personnel need to put a better foot forward. We believe, too, that greater flexibility is in order, and administrative measures to achieve this should be developed once basic decisions on the size and functions of SWS are made.
- Scope. As noted above, we believe SWS should concentrate on the strategic warning subset, but we recommend against a hard demarcation line between its responsibilities and those of the NIOs. It cannot, however, spread itself thin, and NIO/W should limit its interests to issues of major importance. We believe that it should contribute to the warning activities of the NIOs when those activities approach the strategic, and that it should, under the guidance of the relevant NIOs, assume the "conscience" role for those questions that are at the core of warning -- Soviet attack, North Korean attack, etc. Its research activities, moreover, should be directed primarily at Soviet strategic preparations and should be conducted under a steering committee of NIO/W, NIO/SP, NIO/CF, and NIO/USSR-EE. (In effect, we are recommending that NIO/W in consultation with other NIOs as appropriate, be responsible for the issuance of warning on these central problem.)
- Name. We believe a decision to retain and strengthen the SWS should be symbolized by renaming it. Among the possibilities are "National Center for Strategic Warning," "National Warning Staff," "Central Warning Group," etc. For convenience, we have continued in this paper to use SWS.

13. Decisions on the strength and functions of SWS must take into account those on NIO/W and his staff at Langley, as developed in Paragraphs 3-6. The present arrangement calls for NIO/W, an assistant, and a secretary. We believe that, at a minimum, there should be

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[] professionals to carry out the functions listed in Paragraphs 3, 4, and 5. [] would assist the NIOs in their warning responsibilities, and one staff officer would deal with "plumbing," crisis management, and contingency planning. Under such an arrangement, the Assistant NIO would be responsible for system and budget matters. [] would be required, for a total of [] How the strategic warning function would be handled is developed in the options below, all of which assume that NIO/W has at least this number of staff, and in some cases several more. The reader should be reminded that the present number of positions assigned to national warning -- NIO and SWS -- is []

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IV. Options

14. We present below a series of options ranging from a larger SWS to none, and analyze their impact on the functions an SWS might perform. See also the attached matrix.

-- Option A: A Larger SWS. Under this option the SWS would be increased to [] Such a staff would maintain a working discipline by issuing a daily national-level warning report. Its report in normal periods would be primarily a device for maintaining dialogue and warning consciousness in and with the Community in Washington and the field. In major crisis, however, it would serve as a vehicle for periodic reporting to policy officers. Manning to this level would permit the Director/SWS to issue such a report without becoming consumed by routine. His analysts would have time to think and to bring their expertise to bear on Community analyses, and the staff would be strong enough to maintain round-the-clock manning in crisis without the augmentation that could be had only with great difficulty in such periods. At the same time, the Staff could make a serious contribution to an inter-Agency research program. [] analysts working full-time on important questions would provide the core around which a coherent program could be built.

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Pro: - Could perform effectively all the functions listed in Paragraph 9.

- Flexibility in manpower recruitment and use.
- Minimal disruption in crisis.
- Strong contribution to research.

Con: - Requires an [] of [] over present levels (SWS of [])

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- Danger of becoming competitive to existing organizations rather than complementary.
- Effective performance heavily dependent on acquiring large number of highly-qualified personnel.
- Daily publication significantly increases risk that vehicle will become stereotyped.

-- Option B: SWS at Its Present Strength. With []

[] SWS could either issue a daily report as in Option A or do this weekly and supply some working manpower for research. Crisis operations would require augmentation.

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Compared with A:

Pro: - Weekly exercise is probably as useful in normal periods as daily, and less enervating for participants.

- Manpower requirement is smaller.
- Smaller number more easily recruited and led.
- Some research capability.
- Danger of competition much decreased.

Con: - Requires augmentation of [] present levels (SWS of [])

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- Danger of being swallowed by paper and routine.
- Loss of flexibility; crisis augmentation would be difficult.
- Manning more dependent on individual agency contributions; high standard more necessary and more difficult.

-- Option C: Maintain Present Manpower Levels. Under this option SWS manning would be [] by the [] professionals and [] needed to provide the NIO staff suggested in Paragraph 15. This would leave an unbalanced SWS of [] officers, and thought might be given to converting at least [] position to []. An SWS with [] would be only slightly less capable than that in Option B, and the same arguments would apply.

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-- Option D: A Sharply Curtailed SWS. Option D would add professionals to the NIO's staff, raising its strength to [redacted] here would be an SWS of perhaps [redacted] total manpower by [redacted] percent. At this level the SWS could 1) provide some synthesis and encourage dialogue through a periodic reporting mechanism or 2) develop challenging analyses or 3) lead an interagency research program. We believe that task 2) cannot be conducted effectively if task 1) has not been carried out to provide a foundation for it. We propose under this option to shift task 3) to the NIO/W's staff, and have provided him [redacted] to lead a research program. [redacted] added, for systems and budget, in recognition that, as functions are transferred from SWS to NIO/W, ANIO/W will be too heavily engaged to give detailed attention to these matters. Thus we believe that such an SWS should be limited to task 1), in effect a "central node" in the system's wiring diagram. It could synthesize agency contributions and probably could encourage a dialogue between Washington and the field. Any larger analytic or "conscience" role would have to be assumed by appropriate NIOs.

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Compared with B and C:

Pro: - Reduced manpower demands.

- Greater flexibility in NIO/W's staff.
- Research program may profit from being directly under NIO/W.
- Possible contributions from greater participation by NIO/CF, SP, etc.

Con: - Manpower very thin, even for curtailed responsibilities.

- NIOs will give less attention than dedicated staff.
- No flexibility in SWS.
- No specialized attention to methodology.

-- Option E: No SWS. Further reduction in manning would make maintenance of a separate SWS inefficient. This option would therefore further augment the NIO/W staff by [redacted] These positions would provide the nucleus for a strong research effort and provide some additional backup to the NIOs responsible for strategic warning.

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Compared with D:

Pro: - Further reduction in manpower.

- No ambiguity as to responsibility.
- All activities concentrated at Langley under NIO/W.
- Greater attention to research.

Con: - No structured links between civilian agencies and NMIC.

- Dialogue greatly reduced.
- Heavily dependent on NIOs, who have other responsibilities.
- No provision for crisis product.

-- Option F: No Special Attention to Strategic Warning.

This would not only eliminate SWS but somewhat reduce NIO/W's staff from that in Option E. He would have ANIO, [] responsible for plumbing, systems and budget, and support to the NIOs, and [] for a total of []

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Compared with E:

Pro: - Greatest manpower savings.

- Small group can be high quality, effective stimulator.

Con: - Strategic warning problem needs attention, especially research. (See NIT).

- Political vulnerability.

VI. Recommendations

15. We strongly recommend that SWS be continued. Options B and C represent the minimum level at which the functions we think essential can be carried out. There is little choice between them, but C is less expensive and we therefore recommend it. In making this recommendation, we are not simply advocating the status quo. We are calling for an SWS that is more vigorous, more sharply focussed, better staffed, and better integrated with the Community.

16. While we believe that Option A offers the greatest potential for the Community, we recognize that, given the history of such efforts there is considerable chance that SWS will be unable to deliver as advertised. Moreover, in the present state of budgetary stringency additional positions will be hard to come by. (Indeed, given its lack of visibility in normal times, SWS at any strength may seem to Community managers a luxury that can be done without.) If further reductions are desired, we see D and E as about equal, although with different advantages. On balance, the existence of the NIT, as well as manpower considerations, would suggest a preference for E. We recommend strongly against F as running counter to the priority implied by the NIT, and politically difficult in any case.

17. Finally, we recommend that you make clear to the Community your desire for its maximum support for SWS at whatever level you decide.

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